

# Drafting and Revising Academic Writing

The Graduate Writing Center (GWC)

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# Graduate Writing Center

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- One-on-one consultations
- All types of writing, all stages of the process.
- Hours for the coming week posted on Friday afternoons at 4 P.M.
- To schedule, see the Center's website:
  - <https://composition.la.psu.edu/resources/graduate-writing-center/GWC>

# Goals

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- To help you develop a better system for drafting a seminar paper in a limited time frame.
- To help you develop sustainable, audience-centered revision techniques.
- To help you develop collaborative revision practices.

# Writing a First Draft

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- Try to avoid anxiety! Some ideas:
  - Set small goals.
  - Write daily.
  - Write when you feel inspired (and when you don't).
  - Write what you can.
  - Don't expect perfection.
  - Don't think too much.

# Writing a First Draft

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- Write notes to yourself.
- Write in a natural style.
- Write the introduction last.
- Become familiar with discipline conventions, expectations, etc.
  - Compare your work to models.

# Writing a First Draft

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Get started with the big picture.

- Generate a working title and your critical questions.
- Describe your exigency (why it matters).
- Write an outline or use other kinds of idea generation.
  - ▢ Free write
  - ▢ Outline
  - ▢ Cluster diagram
  - ▢ Create topic sentences

# Sample Template Phrases: Introducing Other's Ideas

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- In their recent work, Y and Z have offered harsh critiques of Dr. X for \_\_\_\_\_.
- X's argument that \_\_\_\_\_ is supported by new research showing that \_\_\_\_\_.
- X \_\_\_\_\_  
acknowledges/agrees/argues/believes/denies/claims/  
complains/concedes/demonstrates/emphasizes/insists/  
observes/reports that \_\_\_\_\_.
- X does not deny that/deplores the tendency  
to/celebrates the fact that/questions whether/refutes  
the claim that/reminds us that \_\_\_\_\_.
- In conclusion, then, as I suggested earlier, defenders  
of \_\_\_\_\_ can't have it both ways. Their  
assertion that \_\_\_\_\_ is contradicted by their  
claim that \_\_\_\_\_.



# Sample Template Phrases: Introducing Your Ideas

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- X overlooks what I consider an important point about \_\_\_\_\_.
- My own view is that what X insists is a \_\_\_\_\_ is in fact a \_\_\_\_\_.
- I wholeheartedly endorse what X calls \_\_\_\_\_.
- These conclusions, which X discusses in \_\_\_\_\_, add weight to my argument that \_\_\_\_\_.



# Establishing a Writing Schedule

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- Know when to stop reading and start writing.
- Set *daily* goals.
- Find your productive times/places.
- Get words on the page.
- Trick yourself into productivity!

# Writing Additional Drafts

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- Work from higher-level concerns to lower-level concerns.
- Read your paper aloud.
- Clarify your main point.
  - Find and evaluate your thesis.
  - Write an abstract and compare it with your text.

# Writing Additional Drafts

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- Tighten organization.
  - Consider writing a reverse-outline.
  - Describe the *function* of each paragraph.
- Make your logic explicit.
  - Check for topic sentences.
  - “Foreshadow” your point at the beginning of paragraphs and sections.

# Meta-discourse

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Meta-discourse provides cues to your readers that help them follow your logic.

- Use appropriate signposts to help your reader follow your argument. Ex: “In order to understand A, one must first acknowledge B...”
- Indicate the certainty of a particular statement (perhaps, probably, likely).
- Foreground your argument and sub-arguments through clear thesis statement, topic sentences, and section headings.

# Revising Paragraphs

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Effective paragraphs are:

- Well-developed.
  - They avoid making assumptions your audience will not.
- Cohesive.
  - Ideas connect to one another.
- Coherent.
  - All ideas clearly support a central point.

# Revising Paragraphs: Creating Coherence

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- Eliminate unrelated information.
- Rewrite topic sentences.
- Separate ideas, and develop them in separate paragraphs.
- Balance evidence and analysis.
- Use “stock” transitional phrases.
- Put important information in the stress position.

# Revising Sentences

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Effective sentences:

- Build a hierarchy of ideas.
- Use active voice.
- Illustrate effective word choice (with all parts of speech).



# Revising Sentences:

## Building a Hierarchy of Ideas

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- The most important ideas are found in the independent clause (the part of the sentence that can stand alone).
  - Ex: Although they have declined, production costs are still high.
- Watch subject length/subject position.
  - Ex: I am going to the store this afternoon.  
Going to the store this afternoon is one of my plans.
- Place the most important words and phrases at the beginning or end of clauses (depending on the context).
  - Ex: The American Cancer Association, in their efforts to cure cancer, has raised significant funds in the last few months.

# Revising Sentences:

## Active Language

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- Use active language, unless passive voice is necessary for cohesion or sentence rhythm.
- Passive voice is often indicated by:
  - Subject is also the goal/object of the sentence.
    - The tree was hit.
  - A “to be” verb precedes the verb in its past participle.
    - “is hit,” “was hit,” “will be hit”
  - The agent of the action follows the verb.
    - The tree was hit by the car.
  - The sentence includes frequent nominalizations.
    - Evolution vs. evolve; immunity vs. immune

# Revising Sentences: Improving Word Choice

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- Avoid empty words.
  - Use the charts on pg. 9 as a “cheat sheet” during your revisions.
- Avoid unnecessary repetition.
  - Use pronouns and synonyms to your advantage.
- Avoid nominalizations.
  - Nominalizations transform verbs into nouns.
  - Ex: The author’s **analysis** of our data omits any **citation** of sources that would provide **support** for his **criticism** of our **argument**.

# Revising Collaboratively vs. Individually

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- Revising Collaboratively:
  - Readers should:
    - ▢ Ask questions about audience, purpose, etc.
    - ▢ Look at overall argument, as well as paragraph and sentence structure
    - ▢ Be specific with criticism and praise
  - Writers should:
    - ▢ Ask specific questions to your readers.
    - ▢ Ask for clarification
    - ▢ Be open to suggestions
- Revising Individually:
  - What strategies do you use to revise your own work?